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MAMMY JINNY'S CHRISTMAS HOME-COMING

Mammy Jinny's Christmas Home-Coming

"MAMMY JINNY"

"—And she could see everything that went on in the back yard."

MAMMY JINNY'S CHRISTMAS HOME-COMING

BY FRANCES S. PORCHER

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By Frances S. Porcher

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FOREWORD

SEVERAL years ago, when the author enjoyed the honor and privilege of being associated with the late Wm. Marion Reedy in the conduct of the *St. Louis Mirror*, she was called upon suddenly by him for an extra emergency story and found it easier and quicker to condense the memoranda she had intended for a little Christmas book into a short story, which she called "Mammy Jinny", in which the main points of this little book were used.

It was a sort of *dernier ressort* at the time, and as an accommodation to the kindest and most charming of editorial chiefs.

But now as we are getting further and further away from the almost feudal spirit of days which had their sunny gleams to illuminate much that was dark and we, who are a generation nearer to its memories, realize how utterly unreal it will all be to our own descendants, it seems as if the true incidents and real pictures of those times are worthy of a place in our Americana. And the incidents in this story are literally true.

Mammy Jinny lived to be over ninety and the children of her former master continued his service to her when he could no longer give it. And so I have taken my first notes and a copy of the *Mirror* story and, at this late day have tried, however inefficiently, to produce the little Christmas book which Mr. Reedy sidetracked for me so long ago. If it is found worthy to fill a niche—however tiny—in the records of a Past that will seem as legendary to our grandchildren as a Norse Saga does to us, its purpose will be accomplished.

FRANCES S. PORCHER.

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I

Mammy Jinnys' Christmas Home-Coming

Mammy Jinny's Christmas Home-Coming

An' I wisht I hed a bin dar—
An' I wisht I hed a bin dar—
To march all 'roun' de gret white throne,
An' I wisht I hed a bin dar.
My Mudder's dar—
My Fadder's—

BEFORE continuing the refrain, which followed an itemization of all the dead relatives and all the prophets and apostles, time enough being given for the recital, Mammy broke off suddenly the wail of minor notes, to send forth most stentorian, not to say harsh, orders to a group of children luxuriating in a sandpile within her range of vision:

"You, Ed'ard, an' Dick an' Little Fanny an' Jinny, ef I sees any mo' ob dat dirt-throwin' in yo' ha'r an' up in de ar' 'ginst de clo'es line, whar Mass Newman's shuts is a dryin', I won't wait fer yer Mas to git home to spank yo'; I'll do it myself with a switch offen dat peach tree over dar. An' whar is dat good-fer-nuttin' nigger Ma'ay, what's

set to watch yuh all? I wisht Mass Newman'd git rid o' her er sell her er somepin; she ain't wort' her salt."

Now as "Mass Newman" belonged to the class of slave-holding Virginians, who inherited their slaves and added to them by purchase when needed, but would never sell one (a funny distinction, but true), the threat brought forth only a combined laugh from the four white children in the sandpile and from the recalcitrant Mary, back in a secluded corner, busily filling herself with half ripe peaches.

But the sand-throwing stopped, for well each youngster knew that Mammy Jinny was not only capable of carrying out her threat, but that she could always count on the backing of "Mass Newman" and the other ruling powers incarnated in the persons of their respective parents.

"I wish Mammy Jinny was dead", muttered Edward, a fiery-eyed, black-haired boy of past eleven, whose hero was Napoleon Bonaparte and whose ambition was to be just

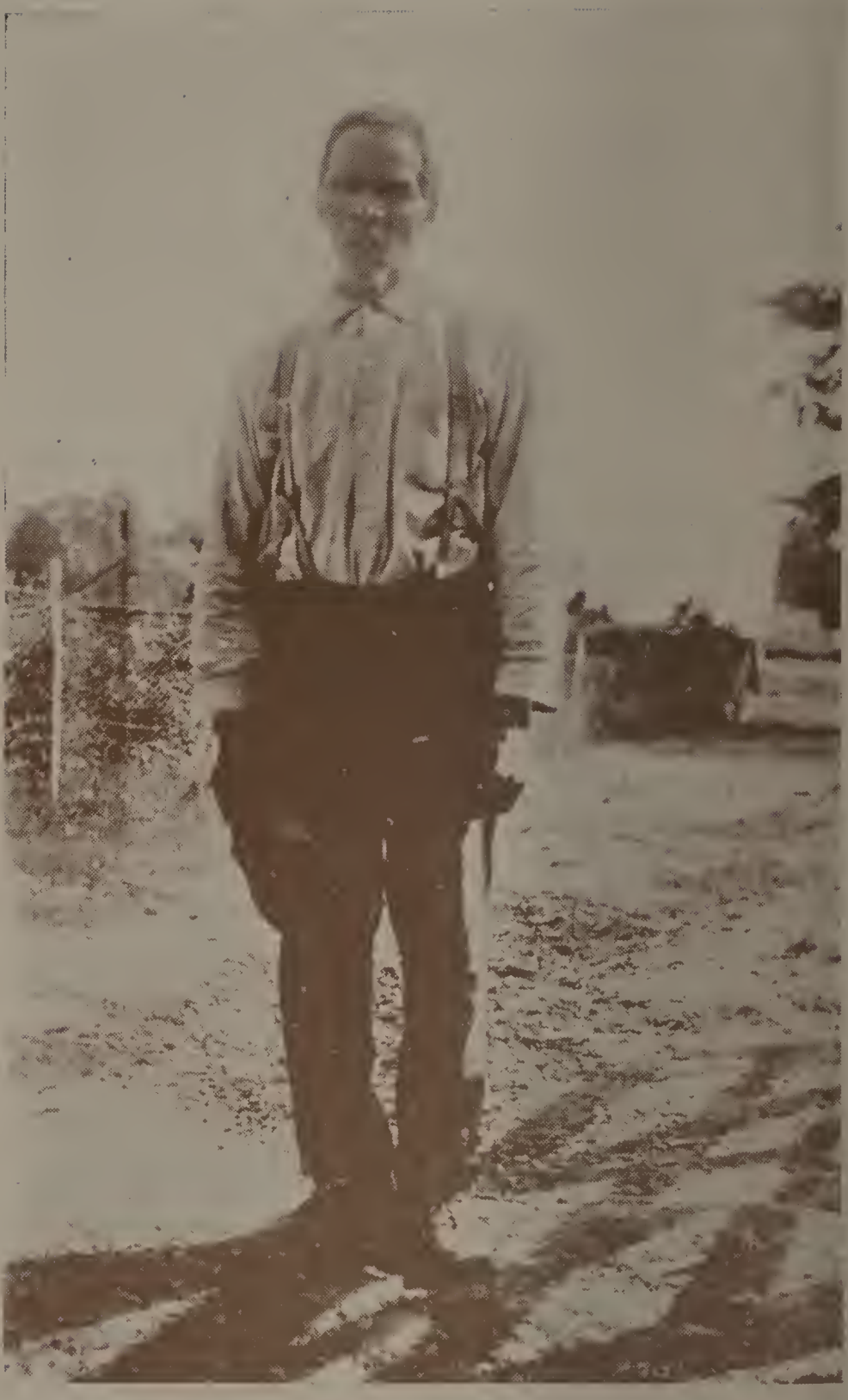
like him, and who had a sneaking notion that he looked like the Little Corporal.

"Oh—ain't you 'shamed?" said his nine-year-old cousin, the "Little Fanny" of Mammy's tirade.

"*I* don't", said Dick, nearly ten, his young brother, " 'cause she's a good Mammy and Father says so."

Jennie, the yellow haired seven-year-old sister, was just then too busy filling a little tin cake pan with sand, for her pet doll's dinner, to have any feeling in the matter whatsoever. What Mammy said—*went,* when the mothers were out calling, as they were today, so what was the use of getting mad about it? Besides Mammy always sat on the steps of the kitchen porch, under the vines, when she wasn't making the bread (and that was all she ever did except wash "Mass Newman's shuts," a privilege she claimed for herself alone), and she could see everything that went on in the back yard, so what was the use of making a fuss about it like Edward always did?

A philosophic soul was Jane Ellis, when



UNCLE MANUEL, THE HEAD GARDENER

her middle name was included, which it generally was when her elders wanted to make a command emphatic, and she did not approve of being jarred out of the even tenor of her way "nohow".

This was in the last days of the Civil War, when Lee's forces were dwindling and Appomattox was coming nearer and nearer on the skyline against the horizon. Jackson's brave soul was at rest, and the Valley of Virginia had been devastated by German mercenaries and everybody, women, children and servants, was very hungry and illy clothed. On this very afternoon the two sisters, who shared one bonnet with another intimate friend, had borrowed a second piece of headgear and gone out to pay a few calls much in arrears. This hat shortage was why only one of these ladies was ever seen at church on the same Sunday, an open secret but not mentioned because too many other ladies were guilty of the same arrangement, some even going so far as to exchange and borrow dresses when sizes permitted.

And yet, to the children, these were not

bad days. They had as much to eat as their elders themselves could possibly do without. The children and servants were the two classes of dependents who *had* to be fed out of the slim rations apportioned to the household. The two mothers were daily growing slenderer and paler but bravely held up their heads because of a hope and a prayer in their hearts that the two men of the family would come through all right—alive at least. One of these was with Lee, and the other in the Southern Division under Cabell. It was this prayer and this hope that saved all the wives and mothers on both sides of the Mason and Dixon line, in the terrible days of '64 and '65, when both sides were weary of fighting, unutterably weary, of the fratricidal strife, and one side was gasping in the throes of dissolution.

And so Edward strutted and waved his "Little Corporal's" sword and wore his tricolor-of-France sash and tyrannized over his brother and cousin, who had to represent the Army of France. These became very tired of it at times and finally broke into open re-

bellion, culminating in the insult of calling him "Nappy" to his face, in flagrant derision, an insult that sunk so deeply in his soul, I doubt if it was ever eradicated. The way of it was this: the house was built on a hill that sloped down in terraces to the garden at its foot and there were sixty stone steps, down which Unc' Manuel had to go with his younger helpers, to cultivate the soil and gather the vegetables. Beyond the garden limits was a narrow strip of swamp land, separated by a low stone wall from Unc' Manuel's domain. There was a law, laid down by the powers up in the "Big House," that made that wall the absolute limit for the wanderings of the children. They might sit on it and look over it and long to explore its wetness and to gather its moss and believe all of Mary's lurid tales about it, of snakes "an' sco'pions" and even devils "an' hants", but "thus far and no farther" were the words of the edict. Naturally the swamp was the most fascinating spot on earth.

There was a most gorgeous red flower that grew there, which "Little Fanny" would

cheerfully have sold her immortal soul for, and did almost break up her fragile body in trying to reach it, without getting beyond the prescribed bounds.

Now Edward, who had soaked his imagination to the limit in the Napoleonic obsession and who was naturally a courageous soul, could ill brook the idea of limitations. To him a wall represented the outward symbol of somebody's inward tyranny; not for nothing had he puzzled over the *"Sic semper tyrannis"* of the great seal of Virginia, at the bottom of his father's framed college diploma. So it was that upon one beautiful spring day, when the swamp seemed to fairly breathe out allurement and to send out tentacles, which drew one, willy nilly, nearer and yet nearer into her beautiful, if treacherous, bosom, and when, best of all, old Unc' Manuel had a "misery" in his back and his youthful myrmidons had concluded to lay-off too, so that the children had the garden to themselves, the Junior Bonaparte called upon the Army of France to cross the Alps at his

heels, as personified in an exploration of the swamp.

Before giving his orders he had his followers repeat the ceremony, often indulged in, I admit, of its Oath of Allegiance to its great Commander, which consisted in kneeling abjectly down and grasping the cross-hilt of the sword, of which the famous General held the point, and repeating a formula full of "I-wish-I-may-die" and interspersed with various choice oaths culled from Mary's vocabulary, "if ever, *ever,* EVER" he or she, impersonating the Army of France, which had followed its wonderful Leader to victory over mountains, through rivers, through snow and every other imaginable barrier, "should hesitate to obey ANY ORDER WHATSOEVER even unto DEATH". Furthermore an inviolable secrecy was pledged even in the face of possible tortures or fires of martyrdom. Oh, it was a great oath, and Little Fanny rolled it under her tongue, while cold shivers of delightful fear went playing hide and seek up and down her spinal column. So much for the Oath.

On this occasion it was taken with all the frills but there was an unusual sternness and solemnity upon the part of the Great Leader, without, however, arousing any suspicion upon the part of the Army, it being used to bombastic flights of eloquence with accompanying mannerisms from "Nappy", in certain intensive moods.

But when the Little Corporal divulged that the "Alps to be crossed" meant in other words to explore the swamp, at his heels, with eyes upon his uplifted sword, upon whose hilt they had just vowed an oath of fealty impossible to falsify, then the whole united Army of France, without one dissenting voice, gave pause and vocally rebelled. Moreover, Little Fanny like the rest of her inexplicable and undependable sex, went as far as human treason *could* go and, not only refused to follow, saying "Old Nappy, old Nappy; you think you 're big don't you?" but announced her determination to go as fast as her feet could carry her up the sixty stone steps and "tell Mamma and Aunt Carrie what Edward is going to do".

Gone, on the wings of the sweet summer air, blowing toward the Tobacco Row Mountains, was all the dignity and solemnity of the famous oath; buried in oblivion's depths the "hope-I-may-dies, etc.," and there was left only the pathetic, little figure in his cocked hat and tri-colored sash, as was his prototype at Elba—alone, "with none so poor to do him reverence".

Of course a wordy war had followed the defection of the troops, after which Edward had resigned from the head of the French Army and sworn he'd never so far forget himself again as "to play with babies and girls, who didn't know anything anyhow and never read anything but fairy stories and were just plain 'fraid cats and tell-tales—so NOW."

Then Little Fanny, tagged by the disgraced Dick, panted up the garden steps and told her tale—to her doll, and the erstwhile Bonaparte stood with folded arms for at least five minutes and imagined he was on Elba, by posing on the wall under a pine tree. Finally he went up to the house, and

stretched out on his stomach, under the big library table, with the little, thick, squatty Peter Parley's History of the World, which was always a recourse and an unfailing resource in times of trouble.

II

Mammy Jinny's Christmas Home-Coming

"Gittin' 'ligion?" scornfully repeated Chloe, "'sif Mammy hedn't done git 'ligion 'fore yuh was borned, nigger."

Mammy Jinny's Christmas Home-Coming

"An' I wisht I hed a bin dar—
An' I wisht I hed a bin dar—
To march all 'roun' de gret white throne,
An' I wisht I hed a bin dar."

MAMMY JINNY sat in front of the smouldering embers of the big open fireplace in her cabin—the best in the "quarters"—and crooned again, over and over to herself the refrain of her favorite negro camp-meeting song. But she was not thinking of the song, nor of camp-meeting. If she had been occupied with either one or the other she would not have crooned, but the full measure of melody would have fallen from her lips, old as she was, with all the verve of youth. And she would have sung all about the various saints and her deceased relatives, in that wonderful procession " 'roun' de gret white throne", through verse after verse, repeating the wish, that she "hed a bin dar," after each stanza.

But the refrain was mechanical, and she

sat, bent forward, with her elbows upon her knees, half rocking back and forth, her pipe burnt out and her eyes half shut. One of the young negroes came to the door and peeped in, then ran back to her companions: "Mammy is a-stedyin' 'bout sumpin'", she said, "an' I don't dast to bodder her."

"What yuh s'pect she a-stedyin' 'bout?" asked a bright looking girl, with a crowing, kicking pickaninny in her arms. "'Bout gittin' 'ligion?"

"Gittin' 'ligion?" scornfully repeated Chloe, the first speaker. "'Sif Mammy hedn't done git 'ligion 'fore yuh was borned, nigger. I don' know what Mammy stedyin' 'bout, less'n tis dis gret talk 'bout de new Freedom dat Massa done tole us 'bout."

Mary, the girl with the baby in her arms, drew nearer to Chloe, and dropped her voice almost to a whisper, as, with a half-awed inflection, she queried:

"What yuh think Mammy goin' do 'bout Reuben, Chloe?"

"I dunno an' I don' keer," replied Chloe flippantly, full of the importance of having

her opinions deferred to, "I hear Miss Kitty's bell a ringin' an' I'll tell yuh mo' when I comes back", and off pranced Chloe, leaving Mary to grapple alone with the question of Mammy and Reuben.

Meanwhile a fine-looking, broad shouldered mulatto man had walked across from the road to the "quarters" and entered Mammy's cabin, with an air of proprietorship.

Mammy did not look up; she went on crooning in a minor key and gently swaying her body back and forth. Reuben strode over to the fireplace.

"Settin' in de ashes as ushal, ole Ooman," he said with a sneer in his voice.

The old woman started a little and dropped her pipe on the hearth. "'Fore Gawd, Reuben, I didn't think it wuz yuh; when yuh come f'um Richmon', honey?"

"I jes got heah", and then, after a pause, "I s'pose yuh dun heah de good news?"

"'Bout de freedom?" asked Mammy, groping in the ashes after her pipe. "Yaas, I dun heah *dat*".

"Good Gawd, Ooman," demanded Reuben, "what fur yuh talk laik dat?"

"Laik whut?" asked Mammy, who had found her pipe and was now balancing a red coal of fire upon its bowl.

"Laik as if freedom didn' mean nuthin'; laik yuh wuz usen to bein' free ev'ey day ob yuh life—dat's whut", and Reuben swelled with importance as he looked down on the little shrivelled creature, twenty-five years his elder, that he had made his wife some ten years before.

Just why he had wanted Mammy had been a mystery to his master, Doctor Steptoe, owner of "The Pines" and slaves galore, but Mammy wanted him as ardently as he seemed to desire her, and, being the most indulgent of masters, Dr. Steptoe had finally consented and the biggest wedding ever known upon the plantation had been the result.

Reuben had not been one of the inherited slaves but had been purchased as a child when the breaking up of a family had put him on the market. Mammy had been the

personal maid of the doctor's mother before he was born and had lost her own baby just about the time the doctor and his twin brother came into the world. There was a dearth of nourishment for the two babies, so Mammy Jinny became his maternal fount and a tie was cemented then and there, between nurse and baby, master and slave, that only deepened and strengthened as the years passed on.

She had always reigned as a queen among the other servants, and now it had been a long period since the old woman had been expected to do anything but supervise the younger negroes. One duty which she point blank refused to delegate to any other servant was the bread making.

"Nobody shell ever mek rolls an' biskit fer Mass Newman while *my* hed's hot," had been her decree and nobody disputed her authority, and another reserved privilege had been the laundering of her master's fine shirts.

"Mass Newman" had once thought to surprise the faithful old woman and to

lighten her labors by closing up the cavernous old fireplace, with its pot-hooks and hangers, and, in furtherance of this scheme, had imported a cook-stove from Washington or Baltimore. Mammy was heart-broken. She hobbled into the library, upon the arrival of the cast-iron monster, and called her master to account.

"Mass Newman," she demanded, "ain't my bread an' cookin' good enough fer yuh yet, or is yuh gittin' so highfalutin' dat de ole mammy dat dun wet nuss yuh at her bress, her own bress, cayn't please yuh no longer?"

"Why, God bless your good old soul, Mammy," he had protested, "there is nobody's bread like the bread I was raised on, from your own special brew of ash-cake to the big salt-risin' loaf you make on Saturday for Sunday dinner. And I'll take my oath, Mammy, that your equal on corn pones and biscuit does not exist from the Mason and Dixon line to the Creole quarters of New Orleans."

"Now, go 'long, Mass Newman," insisted the half-mollified and wholly delighted old

servant; "dat's all right to talk comp'mens to yo ole Mammy, but dat ain't whut I come a-climbin' up dose steps, wid a misery in my back, fer."

Doctor Steptoe went out of the room and returned with a glass of wine in his hand. "Here, Mammy," he said, "this will cure the misery. Come, drink it down and then tell me what all this fuss is about in the kitchen."

"Your health, Marster," and the little old woman bowed over the glass, after which she proceeded to register a solemn and vigorous protest against the stove.

No arguments could convince her that a cook-stove was anything short of an invention of the Devil (in capital letters) or, that the presence of one meant anything less than an aspersion upon her own transcendent abilities as a bread maker and supervisor of general cookery.

As might have been expected, the conference closed, with Mammy victorious and her master surrendered completely, when he finally said: "Go on, Mammy, and break

your poor old back, if you want to, over pothooks and cranes; I wash my hands of the whole business."

"Thankee, Mass Newman, thankee," answered Mammy in a broad grin, "An' whut mus' I do wid dat stove now?"

"I don't care what," replied Doctor Steptoe, as he turned to his writing-table, "I bought it for you and you can throw it in the 'Jeems' if you like."

But it was not thrown into the classic waters of the James.

These incidents occurred a year or two before the shot at Sumter had set the world's echoes rolling, and now Lee had surrendered to Grant upon the field at Appomattox and in a dark corner of the smoke-house the stove still reposed in its original crate, yellow with the rust of years, while the bread for the Steptoe table was baked in the fireplace, where bread for Steptoes had been baked from father to son, for generation after generation.

It was the same woman, tenacious of the old ways, that had looked up at her husband

and asked laconically: "Laik whut?" a question that had called forth his contempt. And then she went on: " 'Tain't nuthin' new—all this heah freedom talk. Mass Newman done tole us all 'bout it when Mass Abyum Linkum made a 'mancipation 'ritin', an' he sed we could go den, but nobody ob his niggers *wanted* ter go 'ceptin' t'wus dat low-down Jim dat ain't no better dan pore-white trash, an' he done cum a-creepin' back fer Mass Newman to doctor him up."

"Well," answered Reuben, "it's diffrunt now. De fightin' is ended an' you an' I is jest ez good as Marster an' Mistis; we is *free* an' nobody kin say 'do dis' or 'do dat'. "

" 'Tain't much if we *is free*", persisted the old woman between long drawn puffs at her pipe. "I done always been free ez I wanted ter be, an' Massa dun always 'lowed yuh part ob eberyting yuh made hirin' out at de hotel in Richmon', an' yuh could a-bought yo freedom an' mine too outen ob what yuh sabed ef yuh'd wanted ter, a long time ago."

The mulatto scowled an ugly, almost murderous scowl and then he changed his

tactics. "I'm glad yuh is so well pleased to be yo Marster's nigger an' leave yo husban': I'm *glad*"—with an air of aggrieved dignity —"*thet yore* kine of 'ligion let's wives giv up dar husban's. I usen ter think it wuz diffrunt, but I reckin *all 'ligion* an' *all wimmin* is alike."

This was more than Mammy could stand; in her heart of hearts she adored the brown skinned stalwart man, who was young enough to be her son and yet who had chosen to be her husband, and, moreover, she was conscientious to a fault as to the strict and literal exercise of her creed. Duty had been the watchword of the faithful old soul, who had never faltered in following its mandates, and beneath whose ebony skin beat a heart of gold, for a soul as white as snow. The tears sprang to her eyes and silently coursed down her wrinkled cheeks.

"*Leabe my husban*', Reuben," she sobbed, "did yuh tink *I would?*"

"Well, it looks dat a-way, Jinny, when yuh talks laik yuh duz 'bout freedom."

"Oh, well, Reuben," and she picked up the

corner of the white neckerchief, that she wore crossed over her breast, and furtively wiped her eyes. "I hates ter giv up Mass Newman an' Mistis."

"Dey ain't no Marsters an' Mistises now", broke in Reuben, but she let that pass unheeded, and went on: "I dun nuss Mass Newman at my bress, when Ole Mistis didn' hev no milk fer him an' my baby died, an' he dun bin laik my own chile ever sence. He ain't never give me a cross word; he ain't never sold any uv his people; he never let no oberseer beat none ob his niggers an' he done took keer ob us in sickness an' in helt', laik I heerd 'em read in de prar-book wen Miss Alice mahied Cap'n Phelps. I ain't got no call ter leave Mass Newman an' I'm gittin' too ole to be tuk up, like a grape-bine an' toted ter strange groun' ".

"Then stay with yer Mass Newman an' be damned ter yuh," thundered Reuben.

For the first time a flash of anger lit up the woman's eyes: "Don' cuss at me, Reuben," she said with a dignity that almost abashed him. "Mass Newman hissef neber dun dat.

Jes gib me time ter finish. I wuz agoin' ter say dat still I am willin' and specs to do my proper duty ter my husban'; an' now, Reuben, *what does* yuh want me ter *do?*"

"Go ter Richmon' termorrer."

"Termorrer," she gasped in surprise: "an' most all de niggers dun gone a'ready an' noboddy heah to ha'f cook fer Marster?"

"Thet's whut I sed," answered Reuben as he turned on his heel and went out of the cabin.

****

Doctor Steptoe was sitting in his library, staring gloomily at a column of figures, when Mammy tapped at his door half an hour later.

"Sit down, Mammy, he said pushing a chair toward her; "I see Reuben is back home; what's the news?"

"He's gwine ter tek me ter Richmon' termorrer, Mass Newman, an' I cum ter tell yuh."

Doctor Steptoe sprang to his feet and made a turn or two across the room. He had raised a company early in the struggle and

entered into the campaign as part of the army of Northern Virginia, but, in the last year of the war had been forced to retire from service on furlough, while recovering from a dangerous wound. He was still very frail and the color came and went in his pale cheeks during his nervous walk across the room.

"Mammy," he said finally, "I have not said anything to the rest of the servants except to tell them that if any of them wanted to stay at 'The Pines' or wherever we will be, I would do the best I could for them, but it is different with you. You are seventy years old and you are not used to roughing it in a strange place among strange people; stay with us, Mammy, and while we have a roof or crust of bread we will share it with you. You nursed me, you have nursed our children, you have served us faithfully, and now in your old age we will take care of you. I do not trust Reuben when he takes you away from me."

"Mass Newman", and a tender quaver came into her voice, "I sho' don't want ter

go, but I dun ma'ay Reuben an' yuh knows what de Good Book says 'bout husban's an' wives, Mass Newman; yuh wouldn' go against de Bible, would yuh? I dun give Reuben my promise 'fore Gawd an' de worl', an' now I is *got* to foller whar he wants to tek me; ef it is troo de fiery furnis, Mass Newman; I is *got* ter, till I draps—dat's all."

The homely black face was irradiated with that inner light of self-abnegation, that shines in certain souls, regardless of creed or color, and Doctor Steptoe, or rather, Captain Steptoe, as he was better known in later years, came to the side of the little old negress and took her right hand in both of his own. He held it tightly and something like a drop of rain fell upon the forehead of his old nurse.

"Don't, Mass Newman," she protested as her own tears fell.

"God bless you, Mammy," he answered solemnly, "and keep you and cause His face to shine upon you, wherever you may go, and if ever you need a friend, send for your old master."

"I'll go and see Mistis now," she said, and she hobbled out upon her rheumatic feet, closing the door very gently. Captain Steptoe dropped down wearily again before the columns of figures, which represented an almost hopeless outlook for his financial future, and buried his face in his hands.

****

Mammy's announcement was no real surprise to Mrs. Steptoe, who was nursing at her breast the small baby, as she had long distrusted Reuben and feared just such a move upon his part. She too pleaded with the old woman until she realized that her entreaties only added to the bitter sorrow in Mammy's heart, and with one final effort she desisted.

"Ah, well, Mammy," she said as she lifted Baby Evelyn from her own breast and placed her gently in Mammy's lap, while she drew the two boys, who were standing by with puzzled faces listening to the conversation, to either side of her: "You may leave us, but how can you leave your babies?"

Whereupon poor Mammy could bear no

more, but broke down completely and, hastily giving back the little one to her mother, hurried away as fast as her crippled feet could carry her, her apron corner held to her eyes.

As for Edward and Dick, as soon as the truth dawned upon them, they burst into tears and refused to be comforted. Every childish quarrel they had ever had with Mammy passed out of their memory.

It had been scarcely eight weeks since the two of them had sworn upon the hilt of their father's sword—purloined for the purpose—to throw off the yoke of Mammy's tyranny and *never, never* again submit to her oppression. If they wanted to have a sand battle, while the shirts were drying on the line, they would have it in future, and not besmirch their manhood by cowardly running out of the reach of the peach-tree switch that Mammy had often wielded with good effect upon their noble bodies. No, they would form an alliance, offensive and defensive, and let Mammy know that, while she might rule the rest of the plantation, including their weakly,

short-sighted parents, *they* had thrown off the oppressor's yoke; *they* were henceforth bound by their oath of knighthood to be free, *free,* FREE.

But things suddenly seemed to wear a different aspect; it appeared as if it were Mammy who was free, not only free but going away, incomprehensible fact, to leave *them.*

And so the tyranny and the peach-tree switch alike faded away and other memories began to crowd in, after the manner of memories, which have an inconvenient fashion of cropping up and reminding us of things that will add to our burdens of regret.

Who, they would like to know, would be always ready to roast their apples on a string and their chestnuts in the hot ashes on the hearth? *Who* would there be now never too tired to tell them wonderful stories of foxes and rabbits and mountains and caves and "Old Scratch"? When they hurt themselves who would tie up their wounds, and, when they were put to bed supperless on account of some heinous misdemeanor, who would surreptitiously steal in when the family was in

the dining-room, with goodies unspeakably comforting to ease the pangs of hunger, and mitigate the horrors of exile? Suppose they had measles and chicken-pox again, or some other terrible disease, could they *ever* get well if Mammy was gone?

At each new thought the wails came louder and the sobs deeper, and, lo, of the two gallant knights, who had sworn a solemn revolt against Mammy's tyranny, there were now only left two broken-hearted little boys, who had been rocked through babyhood on Mammy's breast, as their father had been before them, and who could not comprehend a future with Mammy eliminated.

III

Mammy Jinny's Christmas Home-Coming

Mammy Jinny's Christmas Home-Coming

HAVING put her hand to the plow Mammy was too loyal not to walk to the end of the furrow, and so, choking down the homesickness that beset her before "The Pines" was out of sight and that seemed to grind into her soul, with every turn of the iron wheels and every snort of the iron monster rushing ahead, she turned a smiling face toward Reuben, when they had reached Richmond and the really neat and comfortable little frame house, which he proudly proclaimed as "home".

"Now, what yuh think, Ole Ooman," he said, throwing open the door and displaying a bright new rag carpet upon the floor, a big rocking chair, a bed with a white counterpane on it and, glory of glories, a gaudy wooden clock upon the mantel.

"It sho' is nice, Reuben, it sho' is," repeated Mammy and, seeing these evidences of his love and care around her, her woman's

tender conscience arose in reproach that she had, even for a moment, let old affections and duties hold her back from her paramount wifely duty. Throwing her arms around him she sobbed aloud on his breast, weeping away her *heimweh,* in the satisfaction that she was by *one* beloved and shielded.

Mercifully the tears of the aged do not flow long, for, at the sound of steps in the next room, Reuben, a little hastily it seemed, pushed her away and, by the time Mammy had dried her eyes and removed her bonnet, was introducing her to a handsome mulatto girl, his "fren', Miss Rosie Belle, who wuz goin' to stay a while twell Mammy hed got kinder usened ter city ways."

In her soul of souls poor Mammy would rather have had no strangers to witness her transplanting into this new soil, but her tears were too recent and the conscience that had provoked them too lately aroused for her to do anything but accept cheerfully any arrangement that Reuben had seen fit to make.

And so, for a few days, she willingly made

her eyes blind to that which she did not want to see, and then, as little by little Reuben and "Miss Rosie Belle" dropped the mask of even common decency, and she had to face the fact that she was only a drudge for her husband and his mistress; that, for nothing else was she brought to Richmond, it seemed as if the poor old heart must utterly break.

But Mammy Jinny had not served the God of her faith all the long years for nothing, and although the heart-ache and the heart-break almost seemed as if they could not be borne, she still struggled on hugging tightly the mad hope and madder fallacy that the patience and forgiveness of a wife can overcome the insolence and passion of a mistress.

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It was years after this, and then only by a word at a time, before her former master and mistress knew all that Mammy had endured in the "home" to which Reuben had taken her with such a blare and blow of pride's trumpets.

There were days of agony and nights of cruelty, when every feeling of regard for

things good and things seemly were wantonly outraged in the old woman's soul, but she lived through them, and, with the self-abnegation of a martyr, buried deep every memory she could, lest some day that which she had suffered might rise to her lips and stab other souls and torture other hearts as hers had been stabbed and tortured.

She could not write and so, if the temptation assailed her to call upon her old master for help, she, perforce, could not yield to it, and besides she knew enough of the man she had helped bring up from babyhood, to fear that his naturally high temper would break beyond bounds if he knew all that she knew. "An' Reuben's got a awful mean dispersition," she thought, "an' he'd kill Marster er Marster'd kill him, an' I cayrnt hev no blood on my pore old soul when I'm 'mos' ready fer my grabe ennyhow."

IV

Mammy Jinny's Christmas Home-Coming

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FOR six months after Reuben took Mammy Jinny to Richmond the household at The Pines went through every phase of domestic tribulation. The best servants, drunk on their draughts of freedom, and expecting farms and mules galore as gratuities from a paternal government, scattered to the cities to see life while awaiting the realization. A few joined a colony to Liberia. Those who remained were more of a care than a comfort, and, without Mammy's firm but judicious ruling power, the kitchen forces were utterly disorganized.

It was a real relief to Doctor Steptoe that so many went away, for the poverty and bankruptcy, that were his gleanings from the war, left him poorly able to feed the helpless negroes. An inheritance from his father, he had always looked upon these negroes as a grave responsibility, requiring the care given ignorant children. He found himself unable

to pay the wages such a host of laborers would demand and he realized that he must learn to manage his corn and tobacco crops himself, with a few helpers, and devote as much of his time as possible to his profession as a chief means of income.

After six months, however, some of the best servants returned and the domestic economy of "The Pines" was put upon a fairly smooth-running basis, so that when Doctor Steptoe was called to Richmond, on important business, just before Christmas, he found time to look up Mammy and carry her a few little presents from his wife and the children.

In a miserable little room in one of the poorest hovels of the negro district, he found her, after a long search directed by one negro after another, who only knew by hearsay from somebody else, that she was no longer in her first place of abode.

Enveloped in the smoky atmosphere of the room, bending over a washtub, she did not notice the shadow that darkened her doorway. Doctor Steptoe observed that she was thinner than of old but the handkerchief

across her breast was as spotlessly white as ever and her bandanna was as carefully tied over her head. She was singing her favorite old refrain, as she rubbed the wet garments upon the washboard, with a pathetic minor in her aged voice, that brought a mist before the eyes of her unobserved watcher:

"I wisht I hed a ben dar—
An' I wisht I hed a ben dar—
Ter march all 'roun' de gret white throne—"

and then the weary old creature burst into sobs, the dry tearless sobs of age, and dropped upon her knees beside the tub: "Oh, Marse Jesus", she prayed, "I done wisht I wuz thar *right now*."

The man just within the door could stand no more. With one stride he was beside the faithful old soul, that had held him in her arms when he had uttered his initial cry of life, and, putting his arms about her, he lifted her to the only chair the place afforded. Then he dropped upon his knees beside her as he had often done when a boy and she had smoothed his hair back from his forehead.

"Marse Newman, Marse Newman, Oh,

Marse Newman," she repeated, "Is it *shore* yuh? Marse Newman, come to see ole Jinny 'fore she dies?"

Then, remembering her manners she tried to get up and give him the chair, but he gently pushed her back and seated himself upon an upturned box.

Then he gazed around him and, with a look in his eyes that boded no good for Reuben, should he chance to come in, he sternly asked, pointing to the tub: "What does this mean, Mammy, and where is Reuben?"

The old woman fumbled nervously at her apron.

"I couldn't starve, Mass Newman," she began;

"Starve, my God—" he interrupted.

"An' I ain't never done steal," she went on, "an' so I gits a little washin' in an' makes enuff ter pay fer de room an' a cawn pone ev'ey day, an' de chillun aroun' picks me up some sticks at de wood yard, and, sometimes, de lady, whar I gits de clo'es ter wash, saves me a piece of bacon, an', onct in a while, Mass Newman, some ob de young gemmen

lets me hev a pipe ob baccy; so—mos' days I gits somepin ter eat. I ez all drawde so, Marster, wid de rheumatiz dat I cayrn't wash much but I tries to git erlong an' be hones', laik ole Marster done tole me when I wuz a little gal".

"But Reuben", demanded Doctor Steptoe, "where is Reuben that you should wash for a living and half-starve?"

"'Fore Gawd, Mass Newman, I dunno. Now don' look thet a way, honey, *Don'!* kaze he ain't heah no mo' an' it wouldn' do yuh no good ter kill 'im. He ain't wuth it, Marster, f'um *yuh*—deed he ain't. We hed a good house when we fust come ter Richmon', Mass Newman, an' I thought it wuz mine, but I soon foun' out dere wuz a yaller gal in it, dat Reuben fotched me erlong ter do de wuk fer, an' I jest could'n stan' dat no way, an' me ma'ied ter Reuben by de white folks' preacher, wid de white gown on an' de ribbin 'roun de neck all hangin' down in front. But I tried to be good, Mass Newman, an' win Reuben back, but I could'n an' den he up an' tuk de tings outen de house an' lef' town wid her an'

I bin a-gittin' on as bes' I could eber sence. No, I dunno *whar* he is, Mass Newman, an' I wood'n tell yuh ef I did. De Good Lawd done say de vengin' is *His* bizness, dat He will do de payin' fer all sich, an' it ain't fer yuh, chile, ner me, ter go a-meddlin' wid what is His'n."

"Maybe you are right, Mammy, but"—the remainder of the sentence was left unsaid as Doctor Steptoe thrust his right hand into his overcoat pocket and clenched his fist there as if he were choking some vile and noxious serpent to death. Then his brows relaxed and the stern lines passed away as he rose to his feet and stood in the doorway.

"How soon can you get ready to go home, Mammy?" he asked.

"Praise Gawd, Mass Newman, is yuh gwine ter tek me home?" she said, with the tears slowly gathering in her eyes.

"You didn't think I'd leave you; did you?" he answered. "I don't know anybody that has a better right to you, and, while the old times are gone and "The Pines" is no longer what it was in my father's day, I can still

make a living for the mistress and the children and you, Mammy, and they will be mighty glad to see you in the warmest cabin corner with your pipe. Now hire some of these women around here to finish that washing; give these few old traps away and I will be here in two hours after you, in a hack, to catch that afternoon train for home."

V

Mammy Jinny's Christmas Home-Coming

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"KE-HEE," cackled Jim, as he drove up to the wayside station that Christmas Eve and saw the Doctor crossing the platform, laden with bundles and Mammy hobbling contentedly along in his wake: "Ke-hee, ef dar ain't ole Mammy fur sho'. Howdy, Marse Newman, howdy Mammy; pears laik yuh'se a Krismus gif' dis time, Mammy Jinny".

Jim had brought a good supper along and it was eaten in the surrey, which bumped over corduroy roads and was pulled through long stretches of red clay and did not reach the home avenue of pine trees before ten o'clock that night. The whole family had assembled upon the piazza at the sound of the wheels and the crack of Jim's whip and, when Doctor Steptoe turned and tenderly lifted from the vehicle the little old colored woman in a black alpaca dress, plaid shawl and poke bonnet (all gifts of her mistress two years be-

fore), the delighted cries of the entire party left nothing to be desired in the way of a welcome.

"I thought I would bring you a Christmas Gift that would please *everybody*", laughed the cheery Doctor as he followed the excited group into the house, "and now to bed every one of you—yes, boys, Mammy and all, or Santa Claus will never get a chance to come down our chimney."

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Long before daylight next morning the children were up knocking at doors and making the halls echo with their yells of "Christmas Gift" as they sought to "catch" their elders and the servants before being "caught" themselves.

It was too early in Emancipation Days for the old customs to be abolished, and yet it was but a sad reflection to Doctor and Mrs. Steptoe of former Christmas Days at "The Pines." The sun of the old days had set but the horizon was still aglow with its fading tints, and so they had tried to make believe for one day that the change had never come,

and gathered their children and retainers about them after the fashion of bygone "slavery days".

There was but little money for presents, but not a soul on the place had been forgotten. The servants, so few now, where there had once been such a host, came to the "big house" to "drink Mass Newman's health and Mistis's" and to "ketch" the "Krismus gif' " that they well knew was awaiting them.

The children shared their "goodies" and ran around to the few tenanted houses in the "Quarters" to divide up and to receive fresh eggs and chestnuts and chinquepins, which had been carefully gathered and stored up that the humblest of the former slaves might do his reciprocal part in the general joy and giving of the season.

The boys shot off their fire-crackers, under Jim's guidance, who enjoyed it as much as they did and altogether it was a most hilarious occasion to them, interrupted by sudden rushes to the kitchen to see "if Mammy was *really* there" and to hug her frantically.

It was a quiet Christmas to the Doctor

MAMMY JINNY'S CABIN

and his wife. The memory of former abundance and greatness would steal into their minds to contrast with their present poverty. There were so many closed cabins in the "Quarters", so many cold hearths and smokeless chimneys, so many familiar faces lacking.

Only one or two neighbors had dropped in to exchange greetings, where once the rack had held a horse hitched to every hook, and not a carriage had driven up the avenue, where once there were carriages coming and going all the day long, with the music of happy voices all about. Every Christmas during the war had been a quieter and sadder season, but while the old servants were there with their childlike optimism, there was at least plenty of joyful noise abroad in the land. But now, upon every adjoining home the blight of the cruel strife so recently ended was apparent. In most of them were vacant chairs.

But Doctor Steptoe had fared better than many of his neighbors in many ways and, though the day was quiet and the oppression

of memory was upon their spirits, it was after all a happy Christmas.

They did not realize quite *how* happy until that night after the children had been put to bed and Mammy Jinny had gone the rounds tucking in each one with a "Bre'r Rabbit" story as a nightcap, and the happy old soul turned back on her way to her old home in the "Quarters" for the night and entered the library where the Doctor and Mrs. Steptoe sat: "I done come back ter my own, Mass Newman an' Mistis," she said, "an' I prays de good Gawd dat w'en yuh is old an' lef' alone He'll tek cyar ob yuh too, an' bring yuh safe ter *yuh own* at las'!"

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